

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES: Lessons on Relationships for Students in Middle School

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Summary of *Shifting Boundaries* and Evaluation Evidence on its Effectiveness

Shifting Boundaries: Lessons on relationships for students in middle school is an evidence-based, multi-level prevention program for middle school students on sexual harassment and precursors to dating violence. The program is unique in that it embraces an environmental approach that identifies multiple strategies to support young people – both school-wide interventions and classroom lessons.

Target population

Adolescents aged 10 to 14-years old at middle school, as research suggests that sexual harassment prevalence rates increase throughout middle school in the US.

Mode and context of delivery

To be implemented within middle schools as an opportunity for early intervention against peer-to-peer sexual harassment and gender violence. Implementation is flexible and can fit around pre-existing student schedules, though we suggest no more than two class periods per week, over the course of several weeks.

Level/Nature of staff expertise required

A training program has been developed to instruct teachers, guidance counsellors and social workers to implement *Shifting Boundaries*. Included in this are lesson plans with handouts for students, awareness posters, and evidence for the effectiveness of the *Shifting Boundaries Intervention*.

Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)

Adolescents will participate in six classroom sessions implemented over six to 10 weeks but can be flexible in order to fit them into school schedules. The school-wide intervention (the second part of the program) is conducted on the same schedule as the classroom curricula. While adolescents are required to create 'hot spot' maps of unsafe areas in the school, the other school-wide intervention uses staff engagement, e.g., to revise school protocols in order to implement the "respecting boundaries agreement", and to increase awareness of related issues through the use of posters and social media.

Description of intervention

Shifting Boundaries is an evidence-based, two-part intervention (classroom lessons and schoolwide interventions) designed to reduce dating violence, sexual violence, and sexual harassment among middle school students by highlighting the right to assert one's boundaries, consequences of these behaviors for perpetrators and by increasing faculty surveillance of unsafe areas within the school.

Learning Objectives:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of sexual assault and harassment.
- Promote prosocial attitudes and a negative view of dating violence and sexual harassment.
- Promote nonviolent behavioral intentions in bystanders.
- Reduce the occurrence of dating, sexual and peer violence and sexual harassment.

Activities:

- Multi-level activities in a classroom and school-wide including small group discussion, Incident Report and Corrective Action Plan for students who violate boundaries

Teaching Methods

- Highly interactive and skill based.

Components of Shifting Boundaries:

- The classroom lessons cover: (1) the construction of gender roles, (2) the setting and communicating of boundaries in interpersonal relationships, (3) the role of bystander as intervener, (4) the consequences of perpetration, and (5) the State and Federal laws related to dating violence and sexual harassment.
- These six lessons use both concrete/applied materials and abstract thinking components. Two of the activities consist of students measuring their own personal space and creating 'hot spot' maps of their school that highlight safe and unsafe spaces in regard to dating/sexual violence and sexual harassment. The curriculum includes a fact-based component based on the idea that increased knowledge about facts and consequences of one's behaviors are appropriate and useful primary prevention tools. Facts and statistics about sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and the legal definitions of all of these terms are part of this fact-based component. Students explore the concepts of laws and boundaries, consider laws as they apply by gender, plot the shifting nature of personal space, learn how to help a friend in need, and learn about other sources of help. One of the last activities dictates that students sign the Respecting Boundaries Agreement, which is tied to infractions of school rules.
- The second component of *Shifting Boundaries* is a school-level intervention. This intervention affects the entire school building and consists of revising school protocols for identifying and responding to dating/sexual violence and sexual harassment, the introduction of temporary school-based restraining orders known as "respecting boundaries agreement", and the installation of posters/social media in the school to increase awareness and reporting of dating/sexual violence/sexual harassment. The classroom curricula and the schoolwide intervention are linked, as the student 'hot spot' maps of safe/unsafe areas in school are used to determine the placement of faculty or school security for greater surveillance of these areas.

Evaluation of *Shifting Boundaries* across three experiments

Shifting Boundaries 1 – Cleveland findings

In 2005, Taylor and Stein conducted an experimental evaluation of *Shifting Boundaries*, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)/National Institute of Justice (Grant 2005-WT-BX-0002). The team randomly assigned 123 sixth and seventh grade classrooms from seven middle schools in the greater Cleveland area to one of two five-session curricula addressing gender violence/sexual harassment (a fact-based, law and justice curriculum and an interaction-based curriculum) or to a no-treatment control group. A baseline survey and two follow-up surveys were administered immediately after the treatment (Wave 2) and about six months posttreatment (Wave 3). This evaluation was the first to work with students as young as 6-7th grades on dating violence. This research demonstrated experimentally that a condensed five-session school curriculum could be effective for 6th and 7th grade students in reducing dating violence.

- The clearest findings from this study relates to the knowledge and attitudes towards teen dating violence and sexual harassment (DV/H).

- Law & Justice group had a statistically higher level of knowledge than the control group at both waves. This finding verifies the basic design and fact-based components of our Law & Justice Curriculum.
- Both groups improved student attitudes toward DV/H, with the Law & Justice Group producing more consistent significant changes across more of the attitudinal components than the interaction-based group.
- We had two significant results for peer violence reduction (peer violence victimization and perpetration) and only one of two negative results for dating violence (dating violence perpetration but not victimization).

Shifting Boundaries 2 – New York 1 findings

From 2008 to 2010, in New York City (NYC) middle schools, Taylor, Stein, Mumford and Woods conducted a second experiment (funded by DOJ under Grant 2008-MU-MU-0010). In this second experiment, the team added a building-wide intervention component to go along with the most effective components of the Cleveland classroom-based interventions to form a four-celled experiment testing the effectiveness of classroom-only interventions, building-only interventions, both, or none (see Table 1). The main findings from this study were that the building-only and the both interventions were effective at reducing dating and peer violence victimization and perpetration.

Table 1: Experimental design for Shifting Boundaries 2 study

Intervention	Receives building-level	No building-level
Receives Classroom	7 schools & 28 classrooms Both	6 schools & 23 classrooms Classroom only
No classroom	8 schools & 30 classrooms Building only	9 schools & 36 classrooms Neither
Total	15 schools & 58 classrooms	15 schools & 59 classrooms

- 28 significant (<.05) results in desired direction (treatment works):
 - 17 significant results for “building only” group.
 - 11 significant results for the “both” group.
 - 0 significant results for “classroom only” group.
- *Shifting Boundaries* reduced “Any” dating violence.
- *Shifting Boundaries* reduced peer and dating partner sexual violence.
- 3 of 5 significant results suggest sexual harassment was reduced due to *Shifting Boundaries*.
- 5 of 7 significant results suggest “any” peer violence was reduced due to *Shifting Boundaries*.
- Knowledge increased for “both” group.
- *Shifting Boundaries* promotes some pro-social attitudes against TDV.
- *Shifting Boundaries* group more likely to intend to avoid perpetrating violence (more pro-social behavioral intentions).

- Increases in more positive bystander intervening for *Shifting Boundaries* group.

Shifting Boundaries 3 – New York 2 findings

In 2011, Taylor, Stein, Mumford, and Liu implemented a third experiment funded by DOJ (Grant 2010-MU-MU-0008). This study extended the earlier work in Cleveland and NYC by: Expanding the study to include 8th grade as well as 6th and 7th grade students and testing revised grade-specific dating violence interventions for middle schools compared to our earlier tested non-differentiated interventions. This study helped address several gaps in the literature regarding how early to intervene, how often to intervene, and how broadly to intervene across grade levels in order to produce a safe environment. In this third study, there was evidence that additional saturation led to sexual harassment reductions. However, overall, the results support a minimalistic approach, in that *Shifting Boundaries* may be effective in preventing dating violence by delivery to one grade (6th grade) as with providing the intervention to multiple grades.

- Expanded randomized controlled trial (RCT) to include 8th graders w/ 6th & 7th:
 - Modifications to intervention- added grade differentiation, addition of 8th grade (along with 6th and 7th grades), saturated environment.
- RCT with four groups (inclusive of classroom & building interventions):
 - 6 grade only (n= 11 schools).
 - 6 and 7 grades (n= 3 schools).
 - 6,7 and 8 grades (n=9 schools).
- Comparison between three arms:
- There was evidence that additional saturation led to sexual harassment reductions. Schools that delivered *Shifting Boundaries* to 6th and 7th graders (compared to just 6th graders) reduced sexual harassment victimization six months post-treatment.
- Results support a minimalistic approach, in that *Shifting Boundaries* may be effective in preventing DV/H by delivery to one grade (6th grade) as with providing the treatment to multiple grades.
- More research is needed to continue exploring the potential benefits of a saturated delivery of *Shifting Boundaries* across all grades, building on our finding that 6th and 7th grade implementation of *Shifting Boundaries* was more effective at reducing sexual harassment than 6th grade only implementation.

Overall summary across experiments

- Across experiments - *Shifting Boundaries* improved DV/H knowledge and some pro-social attitudinal changes against dating violence.
- NYC1- *Shifting Boundaries* increases behavioral intentions to reduce violence and increases the likelihood of more positive bystander intervening for treatment.
- Cleveland study - mixed evidence related to behavioral reductions in violence, positive results for peer violence and some negative results for dating violence perpetration (but not victimization) and no change for sexual harassment.
- NYC1 study - *Shifting Boundaries* led to reductions in “any” dating violence, reductions in peer and dating partner sexual violence, and majority of evidence is that the interventions may be effective at reducing sexual harassment and “any” peer violence but require more research
- Building intervention alone can be effective and is a low-cost efficient approach to violence reduction

- Classroom lessons alone are not effective but can be when combined with the building intervention which might explain the less consistent results for the Cleveland study which did not include the school-wide interventions.
- *Shifting Boundaries* is cost-effective relying largely on existing resources and our free SB material.

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